

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF GANDHIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Dr.D.VijayChander
Principal
St.Francis College of Education

Keywords: Gandhian philosophy, twin cardinal principles , Truth, Thought, himsa, Non- Violence, Technology, Society, Implementation.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi in his article titled 'National Education' published in Young India on 1 September 1921 has written that it might be true regarding other countries but in India where 80% of the population is occupied with agriculture and 10% of it with industries, it is an offense to make education merely literary. It is apparent from these lines that according to Mahatma Gandhi, education is not only to gain literary knowledge. Although he has tried to confine his above-mentioned statement within the Indian perspective, in my opinion, education cannot be restricted to the knowledge of letters of the alphabet or the study of literature irrespective of the circumstances or the economic resources of any nation in the world. In addition to literary knowledge, education should include the moral, physical and mental development of a person. In course of time, education has to develop a person in all respects in order to enable him to become self-reliant. To become self-dependant or for his all-round development, it is necessary that he should have moral upliftment in addition to his physical or intellectual development. It is absolutely necessary that he should not only be able to earn his bread but should be able to fulfill the obligations of his family and in carving the path of his progress, should ultimately be able to achieve his goal in life. A young man or woman may pass the Graduate or the Postgraduate examination with first division or may further acquire the M. Phil, or Ph.D. degree, but still, he/she does not become self-dependant and is not able to channelize his/her future along successful lines by worrying about his/her day-to-day problems. In such a case, will the education received by him/her or the degrees acquired by him/her be regarded as meaningful? In my opinion, such an education or degree is useless. This reality can be perceived not only in India but in other countries also. Therefore, Mahatma Gandhi's statement that education does not mean getting literary knowledge is true even in the context of the world.

It is a fact that our system of education has been defective for the last many decades. Even after independence, our leaders have not taken such steps as they should have to reform our defective educational system. Since independence and till now, many committees and commissions have been formed, but how much improvement has been made in the sphere of education? Not much. People like Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Zakir Hussain, well-known educationists on national and international levels, have been the Presidents of our country. It is an anomaly that education has not been able to give right direction to our youths, or to provide them opportunities for their all-round development or to make them self-dependant. The number of students for higher education increases every year and is still growing further. If we do not awaken at the right time and bring changes in our defective educational system according to the view-points of Mahatma Gandhi, the situation would become so serious that we would not be able to manage it. Mahatma Gandhi, an advocate of a solid foundation for human beings was firm on giving free and compulsory elementary education to all. In Harijan of 9 October 1937, he wrote that he was firmly in favour of the principle of free and compulsory education for India.

It is the requirement of the nation and is important at the international level as well. There is also the possibility of their becoming self-dependant. If Mahatma Gandhi's views on higher education are analyzed and reviewed in the perspective of the circumstances prevailing today, the above stated educational system would be according to them. It will be in proximity to his statement in which he expressed his desire that by changing the nature of college education, he would make it conform to the needs of the nation.

Mahatma Gandhi had talked about self-sufficiency of colleges and universities. It meant that these institutions instead of depending on government aid should be self-financed. India is an agricultural country. Most of the industries are based on agriculture. Gandhi wanted that more and more self-financed Agriculture-Colleges should be opened and they should be attached to related industries which would turn out graduates according to their requirement. Not only this, they should bear the expenses of their education and the training staff. Gandhi wanted the same system to be adopted for graduates of engineering and medical colleges. Engineering graduates should be attached to the related industry and medical graduates to hospitals. Law, Commerce and Arts colleges can be managed by voluntary organizations and donations can be procured according to their requirement. Mahatma Gandhi was never in favour of government aid. He, however, wanted the universities' control over the colleges and that of the government over the universities.

What is Gandhian philosophy? It is the religious and social ideas adopted and developed by Gandhi, first during his period in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and later of course in India. These ideas have been further developed by later "Gandhians", most notably, in India, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. Outside of India some of the work of, for example, Martin Luther King Jr. can also be viewed in this light. Understanding the universe to be an organic whole, the philosophy exists on several planes - the spiritual or religious, moral, political, economic, social, individual and collective. The spiritual or religious element and God is at its core. Human nature is regarded as fundamentally virtuous. All individuals are believed to be capable of high moral development and of reform.

The twin cardinal principles of Gandhi's thought are truth and nonviolence. It should be remembered that the English word "truth" is an imperfect translation of the Sanskrit, "Satya", and "nonviolence", an even more imperfect translation of "ahimsa". Derived from "sat" - "that which exists" - "Satya" contains a dimension of meaning not usually associated by English speakers with the word "truth". There are other variations, too, which we need not go into here. For Gandhi, truth is the relative truth of truthfulness in word and deed, and the absolute truth - the Ultimate Reality. This ultimate truth is God (as God is also Truth) and morality - the moral laws and code - its basis. Ahimsa, far from meaning mere peacefulness or the absence of overt violence, is understood by Gandhi to denote active love - the pole opposite of violence, or "himsa", in every sense. The ultimate station Gandhi assigns nonviolence stems from two main points.

The reader of Gandhi's works published by Navajivan Trust will notice that many are prefaced with the following quotation from an April 1933 edition of "Harijan", one of Gandhi's journals. He states straightforwardly: "I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth, I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.... What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he still has any faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject." That there are inconsistencies in Gandhi's writings accords with the fact that the ideas are not a system. In coming to

grips with Gandhi's way of thinking it is most important to understand that the perception of truth undergoes an ongoing process of refinement which is evolutionary in nature.

Gandhian philosophy is also compatible with the view that humankind is undergoing gradual moral evolution. While conflict is seen as inevitable, in fact not always undesirable, violence as the result of the conflict is not regarded as inevitable. Simply put, human beings do have the capacity to resolve conflict non-violently. This might be difficult, but it is not impossible. Liberation from a violent society is seen as requiring many decades or longer - but it is not an impossible ideal.

As the foundation of the Gandhian or nonviolent social order is religious or spiritual, economic and political questions are seen from the moral or humanistic perspective. The welfare of human beings, not of systems or institutions, is the ultimate consideration. Materially, it centers on the following concepts and ideals:

- Political decentralization, to prevent massive concentrations of political power in the hands of too few; rather, to distribute it in the hands of many. The Gandhian political order takes the form of a direct, participatory democracy, operating in a tier structure from the base village-level tier upward through the district and state levels to the national (and international) level.
- Economic decentralization, to prevent massive concentrations of economic power in the hands of too few, and again, to distribute it in the hands of many. Therefore villages, which are anyway geographically decentralized, become the basic economic units. However, where unavoidable, certain industries may be organized on a more centralized basis, and their ownership and control come under the umbrella of the State.
- The minimization of competition and exploitation in the economic sphere, and instead, the encouragement of cooperation.
- Production on the basis of need rather than greed, concentrating where India is concerned first on the eradication of poverty (and on the worst extreme of poverty).
- Recognition of the dignity of labour and the greater purity of rural life.
- The practice of extensive self-reliance by individuals, villages, regions and the nation.
- The absence of oppression on the basis of race, caste, class, language, gender or religion.

- A deep respect for mother nature, necessitating an economic system based upon the preservation rather than the destruction of the natural environment.

(However, Marxists have traditionally rejected Gandhi because of what they regard as his "bourgeois" outlook. Gandhi rejected violent class conflict and the centralization of political and economic power in the hands of the State as counterproductive to the development of a nonviolent society.) Nevertheless, Gandhian philosophy, particularly in the Sarvodaya ideal, does contain many socialist sentiments. In fact, such an entity as Gandhian Socialism emerged in theoretical literature during the 1970s and 1980s. Gandhi's thought has been likened also to Utopian Socialism and Philosophical Anarchism and can be compared with strands of Maoist thought (though not a Western philosophy), and even Western liberal thought. However, Gandhi is incompatible with many aspects of Liberalism and is virtually entirely incompatible with the modern, intensely competitive, ecologically destructive and materialistic capitalism of the West.

The ultimate responsibility of a Gandhian is to resist clear injustice, untruth, in conjunction with others or alone. Resistance should be nonviolent if at all possible. But Gandhi did condone the use of violent means in certain circumstances, in preference to submission which he regarded as cowardice and equivalent to cooperation with evil. In relation to the use of violence, he stated categorically "Where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence..." As surprising as it no doubts sounds, Gandhi disliked most not violence, but cowardice and apathy. The eminent peace researcher Johan Galtung has correctly observed that Gandhi preferred first, nonviolent resistance, second, violence in a just cause, and third, meaning least of all, apathy. In general, however, it is held that immoral means, such as violence, cannot produce moral ends, as means are themselves ends or ends in the making.

His Contributions:

Gandhiji's model was not only holistic and practical, it was highly decentralized and integrated, with a demonstrated capacity to motivate the entire community and place responsibility and accountability at the community level versus the State. To highlight just a few of his contributions

The Basic Philosophy

(a) True education is the all-round development of the faculties, best attained through action. It bases itself on the fact that knowledge and understanding develop in relation to problems set right by action. Information thrust on the mind only burdens the memory and causes intellectual indigestion, casting learning into oblivion.

(b) Education must be concrete and interconnected, not abstract or given in isolated sections. Concrete education allows the learner to manipulate problems or sets of problems and study their

relationships, character and artistic sense. It allows the mind, heart, hand and eyes to work simultaneously in a correlated manner, resulting in a harmonious and well-balanced personality.

(c) Education must be imparted in the child's mother tongue and organically connected with the child's Social and Cultural environment.

Aims and Goals:

(a) All boys and girls in India should grow up to seek truth and peace.

(b) All children should grow up as citizens in a new social order, based on Co-operative work and with the understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and obligations in such a society.

(c) Every individual child should have full opportunity for the balanced and harmonious development of all his/her faculties and should acquire the capacity for self-reliance in every aspect of a clean, healthy and cultured life, together with an understanding of the social, political and moral implications of such a life.

The Five Stages:

(a) Adult Education - involvement of educated parents (with productive skills) and the community for a happy, healthy, clean and self-reliant life. An educated adult's participation is closely connected to the success of pre-school, primary and secondary education.

(b) Pre-School Education - for children under-7, both boys, and girls, to develop their faculties conducted by School teachers in cooperation with the parents and the community. It includes physical nurture, medical care, personal cleanliness and health, community cleanliness and health, self-help, social training, creative activities

in work and plays for the acquisition of basic concepts, speech training, development of mathematical sense, nature study, art and music and spiritual development.

(c) Primary Education - education for self-sufficiency, of eight years duration for children in the age group of 7-15, with the same subjects and curricular contents for both boys and girls, irrespective of their caste or class.

(d) Secondary Education - education through self-sufficiency or vocational education of four years duration, with the same curricular contents for adolescent boys and girls in the age group of 15-18, irrespective of their caste or class. It must provide for a great range of productive activities to support the community and provide the basis for sound and well-organized knowledge.

(e) Tertiary Education - It should either lead to the responsibilities of adult family life or some form of professional training in the university.

Program of Work

There are five fundamental activities around which the program of work for adult education, pre-school education, primary education and secondary education are recommended.

(a) Clean and Healthy Living to focus on personal and social habits and attitudes of health, cleanliness, and hygiene towards self and community; practical skills to carry out all types of proper cleaning and sanitation work efficiently.

(b) Self-Reliance to focus on economic self-support for its own sake and for character training.

(c) Productive Basic Crafts to focus on three most suited crafts for children by age for developing intelligence and general knowledge. The three basic crafts are the main center of correlation for the "core subjects" of language, mathematics, general science and social science.

(d) Citizenship in Community to focus on developing habits and attitudes of cooperation and neighborliness at home, at school, and in the community.

(e) Recreational and Cultural Activities to focus on games, dance, music, drama, festivals relating to social, religious, historical and national significance.

Implementation Strategy

- (a) The Panchayat Samitis and local bodies along with the teachers must decide the objectives, curriculum, and syllabus. However, it must be according to age and developmental norms, as well as gender sensitive.
- (b) The curriculum materials and activities must be indigenous, inexpensive using common objects of ordinary Indian life and people.
- (c) The text books must be written by renowned teachers themselves from the child's view point both from the level of concepts and language.
- (d) Practical and theoretical training should be given to the teachers, on the needs of the villages, in the villages itself. Use the same teachers for adult education as it saves on planning and capital outlay.
- (e) The latest instructional technologies must be utilized for imparting training.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dr. Y. K. Singh, educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi APH publishing corporation, Delhi, 2009. 13. N. L. Gupta, Mahatma Gandhi an educational Thinker, Anmol Publication, 2002
- Dr. Z. Hasan, Gandhiji and The Harijans, Shree publishing House, New Delhi – 1986.
- Dr. Zaheer hasan, the relevance of Ruskin and Gandhi, Shree Publishing house, New Delhi, 1985.
- Dutta Meshara, Gandhism After Gandhi, Mittla Publications New Delhi. 1999.
- Easwaran, Eknath (2011). Gandhi the Man: How One Man Changed Himself to Change the World. Nilgiri Press. ISBN 978-1-586380-55-7.*
- Erikson, E.H., Gandhi's Truth: The Origins of Militant Non-Violence, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1969.
- Fischer Louis, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi, London, Granada Publishing Ltd., 1982.
- Fox, Richard G., Gandhian Utopia: Experiments with Culture, Beacon Press, Boston 1989.
- Fulop-Milier, Rene, Lenin and Gandhi, London, G.P. Putnams' Sons, 1930.
- Galvano Dellavoipe, John Fraser Roussenu and Marx Lawrence and Wishart London, 1978. Gandhi (Mahatma), (1968), The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: The voice of truth,
Navajivan Pub. House.
- Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1977) The Collected Works , Ahmedabad: Navajivan.
- Gandhi, M.G., Gandhi and Marx: Study in Ideological Polarities, Chandigarh, Vikas Bharti, 1969.